

# **WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE**

## **2019 REGULAR SESSION**

**Introduced**

### **House Bill 2195**

BY DELEGATES SHOTT AND FAST

[Introduced January 9, 2019; Referred  
to the Committee on the Judiciary.]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §15-9-4 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, and to  
2 amend said code by adding thereto a new article, designated §15-9C-1, §15-9C-2, §15-  
3 9C-3, §15-9C-4 and §15-9C-5, all relating to creating the West Virginia Sentencing  
4 Commission; establishing the commission as a standing subcommittee of the Governor's  
5 committee on crime, delinquency and correction; authorizing the commission to seek and  
6 utilize funding and grants; setting forth legislative findings; setting forth the purpose of the  
7 commission; establishing composition and membership of commission; setting forth the  
8 powers and duties of the commission; setting forth objectives for the commission; directing  
9 commission provide annual assessment and recommendations to the Legislature; and  
10 authorizing the commission to make additional recommendations to the Legislature.

*Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:*

**ARTICLE 9. GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON CRIME, DELINQUENCY AND  
CORRECTION.**

**§15-9-4. Criminal sentencing research Sentencing Commission Subcommittee.**

1 ~~The Governor's committee on crime, delinquency and correction shall conduct~~  
2 ~~comprehensive research on the state's criminal sanctioning process for adult offenders. The~~  
3 ~~purpose of the research is to promote a fuller understanding of this state's criminal justice system,~~  
4 ~~and shall include the review of issues of sentence length imposed, actual sentence length served,~~  
5 ~~parole eligibility, parole revocation, determinate or indeterminate sentences, availability of~~  
6 ~~alternatives to incarceration for certain offenses, and the respective roles that each of these and~~  
7 ~~other criminal sanction issues may play in the increased demand for prison bed space. The~~  
8 ~~committee shall report to the Governor and the Legislature on or before January 1, 2004, and at~~  
9 ~~its discretion thereafter, the findings of its research and make any recommendations for~~  
10 ~~modifications of criminal sentencing laws or procedures provided that no such recommendations~~  
11 ~~or modifications shall become effective without further action of the Legislature~~

12           The Governor's committee on crime, delinquency, and correction shall have a standing  
 13 subcommittee known as the West Virginia Sentencing Commission. To the extent requested or  
 14 necessary, the commission shall be staffed and supported by the Division of Justice and  
 15 Community Services. The commission, by and through the division, may seek and use funding  
 16 and grants in furtherance of the purposes and mission of the commission.

**ARTICLE 9C. WEST VIRGINIA SENTENCING COMMISSION.**

**§15-9C-1. Legislative findings.**

1           The Legislature finds and declares that there is:

2           (1) A need for fair and uniform sentencing;

3           (2) A need for research on issues regarding sentencing in order to promote a fuller  
 4 understanding of the efficient, just and fair operation of this state's criminal justice system;

5           (3) A need for establishing priorities with regard to the severity of the criminal offenses;

6 and

7           (4) A need to use the limited correctional resources in the state in a manner best able to  
 8 fulfill the goals of criminal punishment, rehabilitation and protection of the public.

**§15-9C-2. Creation of sentencing commission; purpose; composition.**

1           (a) The West Virginia Sentencing Commission is hereby created as a standing  
 2 subcommittee of the Governor's committee on crime, delinquency, and correction.

3           (b) The purpose of the commission is to promote a fuller understanding of this state's  
 4 criminal justice sentencing system, and shall include the review and research of issues of  
 5 sentence length imposed, actual sentence length served, parole eligibility, parole revocation,  
 6 determinate or indeterminate sentences, availability of alternatives to incarceration for certain  
 7 offenses, and the respective roles that each of these and other criminal sanction issues may play  
 8 in the increased demand for prison bed space.

9           (c) The commission shall consist of the following members, who shall serve without  
 10 compensation:

11 (1) The Secretary of the Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety, or his or her  
12 designee;

13 (2) Two prosecuting attorneys, or assistant prosecuting attorneys, from two different  
14 counties chosen by the President of the West Virginia Prosecuting Attorneys Association;

15 (3) Two public defenders, or assistant public defenders, from two different judicial circuits  
16 chosen by the Director of the Public Defender Services;

17 (4) One representative from the West Virginia Chief of Police Association who shall be  
18 chosen by the Executive Director of that organization;

19 (5) One representative from the West Virginia Sheriff's Association who shall be chosen  
20 by the Executive Director of that organization;

21 (6) Two representatives from the West Virginia Judicial Association who shall be current  
22 circuit court judges and chosen by the executive committee of that organization, who shall serve  
23 as ex officio members;

24 (7) One member of the West Virginia Association on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse  
25 Counselors who shall be chosen by the president of the organization; and

26 (8) Two members of the West Virginia Legislature, one chosen by the Speaker of the  
27 House and one chosen by the President of the Senate; who shall serve as ex officio members of  
28 the commission.

29 (d) Each member serves a two-year term, with the exception of the ex officio members  
30 who serve as long as they hold their respective offices.

31 (e) The chairperson of this commission shall be elected by the other members of the  
32 commission. The first meeting shall be chaired by the Director of the Division of Justice and  
33 Community Services.

34 (f) Six members of the commission is a quorum.

35 (g) The Director of the Division of Justice and Community Services shall serve as  
36 Executive Director of the Commission and the division shall provide administrative services to the  
37 commission.

**§15-9C-3. Powers and duties of the commission.**

1           (a) The West Virginia Sentencing Commission established pursuant to this article:

2           (1) May request information, data and reports from any officer or agency of the state  
3 government, as the commission may, from time to time, require and as may be produced  
4 consistent with other law;

5           (2) Issue invitations requesting the attendance and testimony of witnesses and the  
6 production of any evidence that relates directly to a matter with respect to which the commission  
7 or any member thereof is empowered to make a determination under this article;

8           (3) Shall establish a research and development program within the commission for the  
9 purpose of:

10           (A) Serving as a clearinghouse and information center for the collection, preparation and  
11 dissemination of information on sentencing practices; and

12           (B) Assisting and serving in a consulting capacity to state courts, departments, and  
13 agencies in the development, maintenance, and coordination of sound sentencing practices;

14           (4) Shall collect data obtained from studies, research, and the empirical experience of  
15 public and private agencies concerning the sentencing processes;

16           (5) Shall publish data concerning the sentencing process;

17           (6) Shall collect and disseminate information concerning sentences actually imposed;

18           (7) Shall collect and disseminate information regarding effectiveness of sentences  
19 imposed;

20           (8) Shall make recommendations to the Legislature concerning modification or enactment  
21 of sentencing and correctional statutes which the commission finds to be necessary and advisable  
22 to carry out an effective, humane, and rational sentencing policy;

23           (9) Shall establish a plan and timetable to collect and disseminate information relating to  
24 incapacitation, recidivism, deterrence and overall effectiveness of sentences imposed;

25           (10) Shall provide recommendations to the Legislature for the creation of programs and

26 establishment of facilities in the state that provide how the state can best shift its expenditures in  
27 a revenue neutral fashion away from incarceration to treatment programs, facilities, and related  
28 services;

29 (11) Shall conduct a comprehensive review and study of national and local trends and  
30 programs that have proven successful in addressing and overcoming addiction and identifying  
31 the nature of the causes of addiction and criminal behavior related to drug addiction;

32 (12) Shall provide recommendations to the Legislature for the creation of programs and  
33 establishment of facilities in the state that provide how the state can best shift its expenditures in  
34 a revenue neutral fashion away from incarceration to treatment programs, facilities, and related  
35 services; and

36 (13) Shall conduct a comprehensive review and study of how bail amounts are determined  
37 in West Virginia and provide recommendations to the Legislature for the creation of a  
38 standardized pretrial risk assessment or bail schedule, provided that the Supreme Court of  
39 Appeals of West Virginia does not adopt a standardized pretrial risk assessment or bail schedule  
40 by January 1, 2019.

**§15-9C-4. Objectives of the commission.**

1 In performing its powers and duties, the commission shall pursue the following objectives:

2 (1) Promoting sentencing that more accurately reflects the time that an offender will  
3 actually be incarcerated;

4 (2) Reducing unwarranted disparity in sentences for offenders who have committed similar  
5 offenses and have similar criminal histories;

6 (3) Preserving meaningful judicial discretion in the imposition of sentences and sufficient  
7 flexibility to permit individualized sentences;

8 (4) Ensuring that sentencing judges in every jurisdiction in the state are able to impose  
9 the most appropriate criminal penalties including correctional options programs for appropriate  
10 nonviolent offenders; and

11 (5) Determining whether the state needs to set out all criminal offenses in terms of priority

12 in order of severity and harm to society and to provide alternatives to incarceration for certain  
13 offenses.

**§15-9C-5. Recommendations to Legislature.**

1 (a) In addition to the dissemination of information set forth in §15-9C-3 of this code, the  
2 commission shall provide, on or before January 1, 2021, and in each successive year,  
3 assessments and updates to the Legislature as to their progress, findings, analysis and  
4 recommendations, if any, as to the state's sentencing and correctional laws and policies.

5 (b) As part of the report set forth in §51-9C-5(a) of this code, or at the request of the  
6 President of the Senate or the Speaker of the House of Delegates, the commission may make  
7 recommendations regarding the following issues:

8 (1) Whether the state should adopt guided discretion sentencing guidelines and, if so,  
9 what type of guided discretion sentencing guidelines should be adopted;

10 (2) Whether the state should alter the manner in which an inmate may obtain credit for  
11 good time served or released on mandatory supervision;

12 (3) Whether the state needs to take action to ensure that there is a coordinated system of  
13 correctional options to incarceration at the state and county levels and, if so, what action should  
14 be taken; and

15 (4) Any other matters relating to state and local laws and policies governing sentencing,  
16 parole, mandatory supervision and correctional options programs.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to create the West Virginia Sentencing Commission.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.